

Short Communication

## The author and date of publication of the Sikkim vole *Microtus sikimensis*

Yukibumi KANEKO and Chris SMEENK<sup>1</sup>

Biological Laboratory, Faculty of Education, Kagawa University, Takamatsu 760, Japan  
Fax. 0878-36-1652.

<sup>1</sup>National Museum of Natural History, P. O. Box 9517, 2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands

The scientific name of the Sikkim vole has variously been given as *Neodon sikimensis* Hodgson, 1849 (see Jerdon 1874, Miller 1896 but misspelled *sikkimensis*, Palmer 1904, Hinton 1926 without the date of publication, Ellerman 1941); *Arvicola sikimensis* (Hodgson, 1849) (see Sclater 1891); *Pitymys sikimensis* (Hodgson, 1849) (see Ellerman 1947, Ellerman and Morrison-Scott 1951, Ellerman 1961, Frick 1968, Weigel 1969, Abe 1971, Mitchell 1975, Qian and Feng 1974, Corbet 1978, Honacki *et al.* 1982, Feng *et al.* 1984, 1986; misspelled *sikkimensis* by Ellerman 1947 and Frick 1968); and *Microtus sikimensis* (Hodgson, 1849) (see Gromov and Polyakov 1977, Sokolov 1988, Tan 1992, Musser and Carleton 1993, misspelled *sikkimensis* by Sokolov; Sokolov and Tan without the date of publication). Thus, it is generally accepted that the author and date of publication are Hodgson, 1849.

The paper of 1849 referred to by these authors was published as a letter to Richard Taylor, one of the editors of "The Annals and Magazine of Natural History, London". This letter, however, was written not by Hodgson, but by Thomas Horsfield. Moreover, in this note the species was not formally described. On this vole Horsfield (1849) wrote as follows (p. 203):

"5. NEODON, n. g., Hodgson.

*Neodon Sikimensis* Hodgs. This animal Mr. Hodgson considers as a new type, though in many respects allied to *Arvicola*. Mr. J. E. Gray at my request has kindly compared the specimen with the Murines from India contained in the British Museum; it appears to be nearly allied to *Arvicola Roylei*, Gray, described in the "Annals of Natural History", vol. x. p. 265. There are, however, in the *Neodon* some differences in the folds of the upper and lower grinders; these, with the other distinguishing characters of this type, will be pointed out in Mr. Hodgson's detailed description".

The name, therefore, is a *nomen nudum* here, apparently a manuscript name used by the collector, B. H. Hodgson.

Hodgson's expected description never appeared. Two years after his first announcement, Horsfield (1851 : 145-146) formally described the genus *Neodon*, based on the structure of the teeth, and the species *sikimensis*, giving characteristics of the pelage and some external measurements. Here as well as else-

where (Horsfield 1856 : 401), he mentions Hodgson as the author for the species. Accordingly, Blyth (1863 : 125) and Jerdon (1874 : 217) used *Neodon sikimensis* Hodgson (misspelled *sikhimensis* by Blyth).

Blanford (1879 : 41-42) already noted that the generic and specific names of this vole (misspelled *sikkimensis* here) had not been proposed by Hodgson, but by Horsfield (1849), though not accompanied by a description necessary to validate the names. Overlooking the description by Horsfield (1851), he remarked that, because of the lack of a description by Hodgson, Jerdon (1874) appeared to be the first author who had definitely described the species. Later, however, Blanford (1891 : 433) used *Microtus sikimensis*, referring to "*Neodon sikimensis* Hodgson, Horsfield, A. M. N. H.(2)iii, p. 203 (1849) (no description)". Wroughton (1920) added to the confusion by giving *Microtus sikimensis* Hodgson and *M. (M.) sikimensis* Horsfield on the same page, without further comment. In spite of the fact that all later authors (see above) have Hodgson, 1949 as the author and date of publication for *sikimensis*, it is evident that the first valid description of *Neodon sikimensis* was published by Horsfield (1851).

The type specimen (BM 79. 11. 21. 395) is in the British Museum (Natural History)=now Natural History Museum, London. The original label reads (front) : "*Type* of *Neodon sikimensis* Horsf., Loc. Sikim, Ex. Coll. Hodgson", and (back) : "*Type* of *Neodon sikimensis* Horsf. *No skull*". In the mammal catalogue of the National Museum of Natural History, Leiden (Jentink 1888 : 89), there is one mounted skin of *Arvicola sikimensis* Hodgson (a ; present catalogue number RMNH 19144), collected by Hodgson in Tibet and given as one of the types of the species. From Horsfield's note and description, however, it is clear that the author had only one animal before him at the time of these publications. In 1849 he wrote about "the specimen" ; in 1851 too, he mentioned only one specimen : "A. Presented by B. H. Hodgson, Esq.", his measurements are of one animal, and he gave "Sikim" as the place of origin. The material collected by Hodgson and now in the Leiden Museum was received in 1853. It was presented by Horsfield with a letter to the museum dated 15 November 1853, in which he writes that the specimens had been collected by Hodgson in Tibet and Nepal. Therefore, it is obvious that the skin of *Neodon sikimensis* included with this material and specified in Horsfield's letter, was received by Horsfield after the species had been described. Consequently, the Leiden skin is not a type. Specimen BM 79.11.21. 395 (incorrectly quoted as BM 79.11.21.397 by Wroughton 1920) is the holotype of *Neodon sikimensis* Horsfield, 1851.

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